Preface

The Middle East and North Africa represent today 'the epicentre of world crisis' (Hinnebusch, 2003: 1) and constitute the most problematic area for international peace and stability. Scholars and policy-makers alike have identified the absence of democratic regimes in the region as the main cause for such instability. The failure of democracy to take hold in the Arab world is therefore widely perceived to be the root cause of international conflicts, economic stagnation and political violence. While such causal mechanism may be over simplistic (Dalacoura, 2005), it nevertheless correctly points to some sort of contemporary Arab 'exceptionalism' when it comes to the establishment of democratic governance. Such 'exceptionalism' however should not be confused with political, social or economic immobility, as the impact of global forces has over time considerably changed the landscape of Arab polities. In fact, up until the end of the 1980s there was nothing exceptional in the authoritarian nature of Arab regimes when compared to other regions of the world and many of the same dynamics of change that characterised most of the globe in the 1980s and early 1990s had an influence on the Middle East and North Africa as well. Thus, even before the sweeping changes in Eastern Europe took place, it was in the Arab world, notably in Tunisia and Algeria, where the third wave of democratisation seemed to find a renewed impetus. Few doubt that the significant political developments taking place in the Arab world in the late 1980s and early 1990s were partly the product of wider international forces operating at systemic level, but most analyses focused on domestic dynamics to explain those developments. Thus, the decisive impact of the international dimension in explaining such changes and the mechanisms

through which external factors operated were overlooked at the time. However, recent developments in the literature on transitions (Yilmaz, 2002; Cavatorta, 2004 and 2005) and the theoretical contributions of globalisation studies have shown how crucial the international dimension can be in shaping domestic institutional, political and economic arrangements. This is particularly the case in the Middle East and North Africa, a volatile region where shared identities, the legacy of colonial rule, international conflicts and the interference of powerful external actors are extremely significant.

This study examines in detail the failed Algerian transition to democracy by focusing on the surrounding international environment and how it influenced such transition. As such, this research, while concerned with the political, economic and social developments Algeria has been through since the mid-1980s, is a study of how international factors are an important part of transitology and how their inclusion into explanations of regime change can offer useful academic insights for a more comprehensive understanding of such processes. In addition, a more in-depth analysis of the Algerian case can inform both contemporary academic and policy-making issues related to the debate on democratisation and democracy promotion in the Middle East and North Africa. The progressive integration of Algeria into the international system and its acceptance as a legitimate political, economic and strategic partner is also examined because the international dimension partly explains the persistence of authoritarianism in the region since Algeria's integration has strengthened authoritarian rule in the country rather than weakening it. In particular, an investigation of the Algerian case can shed light on the role and the influence of political Islam in international politics. Fifteen years before Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections of January 2006 (Hroub, 2006; Chehab, 2007) generated an academic and political storm of controversy, the Algerian Front Islamique de Salut (FIS) had won the first round of the Algerian legislative elections and was poised to take power through the ballot box. This was the first time that an Islamist party had been allowed to compete in free and fair elections in the Arab world, but a military coup prevented it from taking advantage of its electoral victory. The way in which the

international community and Algerian political actors handled such a victory set the trend for how the relations between authoritarian Arab regimes, representatives of political Islam, liberal-minded reformers and powerful external actors were to be conducted in the future. All actors across the Arab world still refer to the 'Algerian scenario' and draw their own lessons from it. Almost twenty years after the Algerian liberalisation and the rise to electoral prominence of an Islamist party, the issue of how to deal with political Islam has become even more central to both academic work and policy-making.

This book broadly examines Algerian political developments in the context of the international environment. Chapter 1 gives a brief account of the failed Algerian transition and identifies the main issues that arise from it. Chapter 2 outlines the research question and deals with the shortcomings of the literature on transitions to democracy. It presents a summary of explanations for the failed transition based on the pre-eminence of domestic factors and challenges the validity of such explanations due to their isolation from the wider international context. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework for understanding the Algerian transition based on international variables. Specifically, it is argued that there are two important dimensions along which international variables have an impact on the actions and choices of domestic actors. The first dimension is the economic basis of the state, the second is its geostrategic location. Chapter 4 looks at the external environment at the time of the transition, while Chapter 5 examines in more detail the linkages between domestic and international variables providing a dynamic explanation of their mutual influences. It argues that the amount of resources and the strategies of actions available to domestic actors are decisively dependent upon international variables and shift accordingly throughout the volatile periods of liberalisation and democratisation. Chapter 6 deals with the crucial issue of international perceptions of political Islam and Islamist movements, focusing on the role of the FIS in the political process. It teases out the different interpretations of the FIS activities and declarations, looking specifically at the impact they had on rival domestic and international actors. Chapter 7 examines the process of integration of post-1992 Algeria, an ostensibly authoritarian

regime, into the international political and economic system and analyses Algeria's role as a regional provider of stability and an ally in the war on terror. Chapter 8 draws theoretical conclusions about the influence of the international dimension in processes of regime change and regime survival.